



# Making a **Non-White** America

© 2008 UC Regents  
Buy this book

**Allison** Varzally

CALIFORNIANS COLORING OUTSIDE ETHNIC LINES, 1925-1955

University of California Press, one of the most distinguished university presses in the United States, enriches lives around the world by advancing scholarship in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Its activities are supported by the UC Press Foundation and by philanthropic contributions from individuals and institutions. For more information, visit [www.ucpress.edu](http://www.ucpress.edu).

University of California Press  
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

University of California Press, Ltd.  
London, England

© 2008 by The Regents of the University of California

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Varzally, Allison, 1972-.

Making a non-White America : Californians coloring outside ethnic lines, 1925-1955 / Allison Varzally.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN: 978-0-520-25344-5 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN: 978-0-520-24345-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Minorities—California—History.
2. California—Race relations.
3. California—Ethnic relations.
4. California—Social conditions—20th century.
5. Community life—California—History—20th century.
6. Race discrimination—California.
7. Human geography—California. I. Title.

F870.A1V37 2008

305.8009794—dc22

2007033313

Manufactured in the United States of America

17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is printed on Natures Book, which contains 50% postconsumer waste and meets the minimum requirements of ANSI/NISO Z 39.48-1992 (R 1997) (*Permanence of Paper*).

# California Crossroads

“Like many other small villages in the wild, majestic mountains of the Sierra Madre de Nayarit, my pueblo was a hideaway,” Ernesto Galarza wrote of Jalcocotán, Mexico, his birthplace. As a result of economic and political instabilities wrought by the Mexican Revolution and capitalist expansion, however, this hideaway ceased to be a refuge. Seeking work and safety, the Galarzas and other peasant families began a series of migrations that would carry them across the Mexico-U.S. border. Passing through Tepic, Mazatlán, Nogales, and Tucson, the Galarzas finally reached Sacramento. They settled into the “Lower Sacramento . . . the quarter that people who made money moved away from.” It was, he wrote, “not exclusively a Mexican *barrio* but a mix of many nationalities,” including Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, Hindus, Blacks, Koreans, and Portuguese, a neighborhood that was a truly multicultural setting.<sup>1</sup>

The Galarzas’ long journey and diverse neighborhood typify the migration and settlement experience of so many working-class minorities in roughly the second quarter of the twentieth century. Inside California’s big cities and small towns, non-Whites lived and socialized in truly mixed neighborhoods rather than ethnically specific enclaves; they regularly bumped into and brushed up against one another as they went about their daily routines. These integrated spaces demonstrated not only that the Golden State had accumulated a varied population but also that this population was distributed in ways that made diversity visible and important to everyday experience. In part, making ethnoracial

communities in California was about discouraging physical and social contacts with other groups. But in the end, the spatial concentration of non-Whites made their intermixing almost inescapable.

Patterns of migration, discrimination, and ethnoracial formation created the state's heterogeneous spaces. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the spread of capitalism generally and American power specifically encouraged the migration of the Galarzas and many others to the United States. California loomed large in the imaginations of Asians, Mexicans, and Europeans as a place of particular promise. It also beckoned to Americans from other states, including Black southerners and Native Americans, who thought their lives could be better out West. These new arrivals set up and settled into systems of difference that expressed the stresses of their migrant experiences. Informed by local diversity, the rise of nationalist movements, and the racial assumptions of long-time Californians, the new arrivals expanded their notions of kinship beyond the familiar borders of village or region. Established Whites participated in this process of making ethnoracial categories by building stronger boundaries around their privileges. In addition to sweeping revisions in immigration and marriage law, Whites' skillful, increasing use of real estate covenants, as well as prejudicial hiring, housing, and educational practices in the decades before World War II, severely restricted the opportunities of minorities.

The consolidation and segregation of ethnoracial groups resulted in multiethnic, working-class communities in the least desirable sections of metropolitan and rural areas. There, a mixture of ethnoracial groups met in schools, community centers, religious institutions, restaurants, and shops. Although European immigrants inhabited these districts, advantages attached to their legal status as White made their residence more voluntary and temporary; thus their attachment to the place and its occupants was more often attenuated or tentative. In the end, the physical closeness of so many distinct groups constituted the fertile ground from which panethnic social and cultural connections sprouted.

#### ACCENTUATED DIVERSITY

The rush of so many immigrant and migrant groups into California created a place of pronounced diversity by the middle decades of the twentieth century. The state had long boasted of a special demography, but the convergence of new peoples strengthened this claim. States of comparable population size—New York, Florida, Texas, and Michigan—had

accumulated large numbers of non-Whites, but none had California's variety. For example, the 1940 census found that Whites represented 95.6 percent of the total population of New York State, whereas Blacks accounted for 4.2 percent, and "other races" a mere 0.2 percent. In Texas Whites constituted 82 percent of the population; 14 percent were Black and a paltry 0.03 percent were of other races. In California 95.5 percent of the population was White, 1.8 percent Black, and 2.7 percent belonged to "other races." The significant presence of American Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and Mexicans widened the range of the Pacific state's peoples. The newcomers who hailed from Asia and Mexico as well as eastern Europe and the American South were pushed and pulled by many of the same forces. Shaping their movement were political unrest and economic distress in home areas—often precipitated by, or at least related to, U.S. engagements overseas—as well as abundant work opportunities in California. Men migrated more regularly than women, a pattern that engendered unique family and sexual dynamics.<sup>2</sup>

As a result, through much of the second quarter of the twentieth century, California had a much larger and more male population of minorities than in previous periods and most other American regions. Although not the most lopsided, its 1940 sex ratio of 103.7 males per 100 females was the thirteenth highest in the nation. Of those primarily western states that boasted more severe imbalances, such as Montana, Washington, Oregon, Nevada, and Arizona, none had populations as large *and* as diverse as California's. Washington, for example, had an aggregate sex ratio of 109.1:100, with twice as many Chinese men as women, and 1.25 times as many Japanese men as women. But the total Chinese and Japanese populations reached only 2,086 and 4,071, respectively, tiny populations when compared with the 39,556 Chinese and 93,717 Japanese who made their homes in California. The larger size of these Asian groups made demographic imbalances more conspicuous and meaningful.<sup>3</sup>

Among the immigrants who chose California as their destination in increasing numbers during the early twentieth century were Mexicans. They joined an established population of residents of Mexican origin with local roots that often preceded the U.S. conquest. Dramatic changes in Mexico introduced during the Porfiriato political period (1876—1911) prompted many citizens to travel northward. Hoping to modernize his country's economy by improving transportation, raising agricultural productivity, and attracting foreign investment, Porfirio Diaz ordered the privatization of communal land, the construction of railroads,

and the introduction of new machinery. As in other parts of Latin America, U.S. businesses played an active role in this economic development, becoming major shareholders in Mexican railroads, establishing industries, and selling manufactured products. The historian George Sanchez has reported that almost two-fifths of all foreign investments by Americans were made in Mexico by 1911. As the U.S. and Mexican economies became more entangled and capitalism more far reaching, land became more expensive and more concentrated in the hands of a few. Formerly independent farmers suddenly found themselves working for wages on land they had once owned. Those dispossessed who could not find work as tenants or sharecroppers wandered into the cities of northern Mexico and searched for industrial jobs. Food prices climbed even as a labor surplus forced wages lower. This dim picture darkened when revolution broke out in 1910, forcing Mexicans to contend with political turmoil in addition to economic difficulties. Increasingly, Mexican workers contemplated a longer migration—one that took them, like members of the Galarza family, across the border into the American Southwest.<sup>4</sup>

Shifts in the economies of states such as New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, and California also encouraged the migration of Mexicans. New and widespread irrigation projects, the extension of railway lines, and the introduction of refrigerated boxcars contributed to the impressive expansion and productivity of the region's agriculture. In the first decades of the twentieth century, California became the nation's leading agricultural producer, a feat made possible by economies of scale introduced by new technological innovations as well as inexpensive labor. Recognizing the advantages of Mexican workers who accepted wages comparatively better than those prevailing in their native country but low by American standards, large agribusinesses sent labor recruiters to border towns. These agents staffed railroads, mines, factories, and farms throughout California. As American workers joined the military or entered defense work during World War I, the depletion of the labor force only intensified the recruiters' efforts and boosted immigration rates.<sup>5</sup>

A disproportionate number of adult Mexican men chose work across the border. In 1910 the El Paso immigration station reported women as only 6.8 percent of those arriving from Mexico. Typically, Mexicans practiced a kind of circular migration in which the men would travel back and forth across the border in rhythm with the seasonal demands of their work. However, the tightening of U.S. immigration policy in 1921 and continued political chaos led some Mexican families to make their migration more permanent, moving wives and children into California.

By 1920 the Mexican-born population, concentrated in the state's southern half, had risen to 478,000 from 103,000 in 1900. By 1940 the Mexican population in Los Angeles alone stood at 61,248.<sup>6</sup>

Asian immigrant groups, hailing primarily from the Philippines, China, and Japan, joined Mexicans in the state in the late 1800s and early 1900s as they too fled political unrest and sought better economic opportunities. Chinese were the first Asian group to arrive in California during the gold rush, and the treatment they received would set the standard for later Asian arrivals. A large-scale diaspora beginning in the 1840s sent Chinese to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Southeast Asia, and Africa, as well as Hawaii and California. Political conflicts, namely, the Opium Wars and peasant rebellions, encouraged the migration. So did economic troubles caused by flooding, imperial taxes, and foreign competition. Yet more than misfortune in China propelled the migrants. The majority originated from the province of Guangdong, a region whose economic development and coastal location meant greater familiarity with the United States. Residents of this delta of the Pearl River enjoyed greater contact with missionaries and traders, who shared news of the gold rush and other California opportunities. Many men acted upon this information, borrowing money, saving, or signing labor contracts to pay for their eastward passage.<sup>7</sup>

Chinese wives remained behind in greater numbers than in Mexican families. The cost of the journey, the men's hope of a quick return, and responsibilities to in-laws discouraged the women's travel. Employers in California also objected to the emigration of wives and families whom they believed would distract workers from their migratory routines. Therefore, although 50 percent of the immigrants were married, most had not brought their wives. In 1885 Chinese women represented less than half the Chinese population in America. Thirty-five years later the sex ratio was a shocking 27 males per female. The gap narrowed during the twentieth century but never closed completely. In San Francisco, where Chinese were most numerous, Chinese men still outnumbered Chinese women by approximately 3 to 1 in 1930. By 1950 a statewide Chinese-American sex ratio of 161.8:100 marked the continued surplus of men.<sup>8</sup>

Japanese began coming to California via Hawaii in the 1890s, a few decades after the first Chinese. As in Mexico and China, the economic problems in Japan in part explained the movement. To pay for its expensive program of modernization and Westernization, the Meiji government placed new taxes on land and adopted a deflationary policy,

leading many small farmers to lose their land. The high wages promised by American agents for work in Hawaii and on the mainland convinced many Japanese to leave their homeland. Their government tightly controlled the exodus, viewing Japanese abroad as representatives of their country. To ensure a more stable overseas community, the Meiji regime encouraged the emigration of women. This prescription, along with the picture-bride system, in which immigrant single men would choose wives after viewing a set of photographs sent from home, created a more sexually balanced society. The eventual Japanese sex ratio of 2.5 males per female approximated that of European immigrants'. By 1920 women constituted 34.5 percent of the Japanese population in California. As the century advanced, the Japanese became both a more stable population, reaching a comfortable sex ratio of 116:100 in 1950, and, unlike the Chinese, one that was more concentrated in Los Angeles County. Seattle had enjoyed the largest Japanese population in 1900, but two decades later Los Angeles could rightfully call itself the "metropolis of Japanese America."<sup>9</sup>

Filipinos, the third most prominent group of Asian immigrants, became Californians in large numbers during the 1920s and 1930s. Perhaps more than the migration of any other group, their movement demonstrated the destabilizing consequences of U.S. imperialism. As residents of a U.S. territory who often spoke English, understood American customs, and carried the status of nationals, these arrivals enjoyed a familiarity with and an ease of entry into the United States unknown by Chinese, Japanese, or Mexicans. The majority of Filipinos who chose California as their destination were young laborers from poor families in the Ilocos region who found it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. Changes in the Philippine economy, brought about by the United States, favored large landowners and commercial agriculture. Dispossessed peasants responded eagerly to American labor contractors who were offering jobs in Hawaii plantations or California fields. Between 1920 and 1927 most Filipinos arriving at the ports of San Francisco and Los Angeles had spent time in Hawaii, but by the late 1920s and early 1930s most came directly from the Philippines. Men dominated the immigrant flow, resulting in bachelor societies that resembled those of the Chinese. In fact, between 1924 and 1929 only 16 percent of the twenty-four thousand Filipinos coming to California were women. This imbalance reflected employment demands, the expectation of a short stay, and restrictions that Filipino families placed on the travel of single women.<sup>10</sup>

Adding to the variety of Asian immigrants were Koreans and Asian Indians. The small numbers of these arrivals made them less conspicuous in California communities and explain the more limited attention they receive in this history of intercultural relations. Encouragement by American missionaries, a desire to escape from Japanese imperialism, and economic troubles all contributed to the movement of about eight thousand Koreans between 1903 and 1920 to Hawaii and the mainland (with the vast majority settling in Hawaii). As in the Japanese community, the picture-bride system helped create nuclear families on American soil. The community never reached significant size in the years before World War II, though, largely because Japan severely limited Korean emigration after 1905.<sup>11</sup>

Asian Indian immigrants constituted a similarly small proportion of California's diverse minority population. Sixty-four hundred Indians came in search of economic opportunities better than those at home, where British land-tenure policies had hurt small farmers. Even more male in composition (about 99 percent) than other Asian immigrant groups, the Indians usually labored in California fields in ethnic group-specific gangs, with some rising to the rank of tenant farmer by the 1920s.<sup>12</sup>

Although the timing and scale of their emigration differed, Europeans found their way to California, too. Jews participated in the surge of emigration that peaked in the first part of the 1920s and prompted new restrictions by 1924. A healthful climate and political refuge from the pogroms of 1905 through 1907 attracted Jews to the Golden State. San Francisco boasted the oldest, largest community. After World War I, though, the westward relocation of Jews already settled in the United States outpaced the flow of Jewish immigrants. In Los Angeles—a destination of growing popularity—the Jewish population grew in step with the city. Although only 2,500 Jews called Los Angeles their home in 1900, by 1945 that number had increased to 168,000. Distinguishing these immigrants from their Mexican, and especially Asian, contemporaries was their tendency to move as a complete family and the rarity of return migration. Jewish communities in California enjoyed more balanced sex ratios and stability than did other groups. So did the state's Italians. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, what Donna Gabaccia called “worker diasporas” scattered laborers across the globe from particular villages across Italy. Although many of these men and women settled along the East Coast of the United States, significant numbers relocated to Los Angeles, rural California, and, especially, San Francisco. By 1940 California's Italian population had reached 100,911—the largest of any

western state. These immigrants, who more likely hailed from northern regions of Italy than southern ones, settled into jobs ranging from construction and agriculture to truck gardening and small trades. A relatively balanced sex ratio prevailed for “foreign-born whites” a census category that included Italians and Jews as well as Mexicans. Although slightly more Italian males than females populated the state, the gap was far smaller than for all other groups except native-born Whites.<sup>13</sup>

Well before the majority of these Italians, Jews, and other southern and eastern Europeans had migrated, Irish migrants had come to California. Like Italians, most Irish first settled in East Coast cities. But the lure of gold drew them west in large numbers during the mid-nineteenth century. When the dream of getting rich quick proved elusive, these Irish at least had the good fortune to find sufficient, well-paid work across the state, work withheld from their Mexican and Chinese contemporaries. By 1870 the Irish represented the largest overseas-born group in California, about 25 percent of the total. They would lose this ranking as the century advanced and emigration from Ireland dwindled.<sup>14</sup>

As much as the arrival of a wide spectrum of immigrants from foreign countries, the entry of African Americans, White southwesterners, and, to some extent, Native Americans in the twentieth century further guaranteed California’s special diversity. African Americans were certainly present in the state as early as the gold rush when they had headed west in the company of slave owners or as freemen to make their fortune. Enjoying the break from southern-style discrimination, the African-American community made San Francisco its cultural and political center. The expense of housing pushed some out of San Francisco into more affordable housing in Oakland, a logical choice for Blacks working on the railroad, which terminated there. Not until the wartime demands of the 1910s, and the economic dislocations of the ’20s and ’30s, though, did migration make the group more visible in the California landscape. The new waves altered the distribution of the African-American community, with Los Angeles displacing San Francisco as the California city with the largest Black population. Propelled by the promise of freedoms denied them in the South—home ownership, integrated schools, minimal racial violence—they came in large numbers. From only twenty-one hundred in 1900 LA’s African-American community had expanded to forty thousand by 1929.<sup>15</sup>

White migrants from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and Missouri may not have added to the racial diversity of California, but as newcomers with distinct cultural traditions they contributed to its

heterogeneity. Migration that began as a steady stream during the 1920s became a fast-moving river in the Depression decade. More striking than the increase in numbers were the changed characteristics and intentions of the arrivals. After the stock market crashed in 1929, an already-struggling southwestern economy collapsed. Low crop prices, combined with environmental disaster, drove desperate farmers westward. As the historian James Gregory explained, unlike previous generations, these people seemed poorer and more driven by bad circumstances than pulled by opportunities. The majority chose California as their final destination, motivated by positive representations by boosters, writers, relatives, and friends. Although by 1940 more than half of the 701,300 had selected cities—especially Los Angeles, which drew three times as many migrants as San Diego, San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose combined—almost 300,000 settled in rural areas where they became critical components of agricultural workforces.<sup>16</sup>

Already a diverse state, California became even more so in the first few decades of the twentieth century. The economic and cultural reach of the United States, the general expansion of capitalism, and political problems particular to European, Latin American, and Asian nations encouraged the migration of thousands. White and Black southwesterners, who increasingly saw opportunity in the fields and factories of California, joined these new immigrant minorities. In the end, this movement enhanced the state's distinctive heterogeneity.

#### BECOMING AMERICAN ETHNICS

This motley collection of migrants slowly settled into new routines and new ways of perceiving and ordering their distinctions. Established residents concerned about preserving or expanding their privileges and setting standards of difference determined the contours of ethnoracial groups, too. As historians who increasingly speak about the transnational nature of immigration have argued, assimilation and ethnicization were always two-way streets. While immigrants and ethnic migrants created their own affiliations, mediating between cultures of origin and cultures of the United States, they retained or evolved “diasporic sensibilities.” Their awareness and active links to events and peoples of their homeland or, in the case of American-born migrants, home regions, became central to the “emergence . . . of nationally specific ethnicities.” In early to mid-twentieth century California, this process of making ethnoracial distinctions or claiming membership in a community was informed by nationalist

movements abroad, a multiethnic population, and racial definitions inscribed in American law.<sup>17</sup> Overall, the new arrivals stretched their notions of belonging, a habit they would repeat as the century wore on. The examples of Italians, Japanese, Filipinos, and White southwesterners represent some of the ways in which all newcomers to California carved out these early categories of connectedness.

For many immigrants, coming to California meant coming to see themselves as descendants of nations rather than regions, provinces, villages, or towns. Despite their physical separation they actively participated in making distant nation-states important units of their political and social experience. Italians arriving in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century considered themselves Ligurians, Tuscans, or Calabrians. They departed from a country that, until then, had faltered in its efforts to create self-conscious citizens of Italy. But as nationalist efforts gained momentum and the unifying, if fear-inspiring, leaders like Mussolini gained power, these immigrants broadened their self-definitions. The failure of Americans to observe the immigrants' regional distinctions mattered, too. Through everyday slights, slurs, and laws Americans constructed the members of villages or regions as Italians. The 1924 immigration act invented or acknowledged European nations, including Italy, in order to set its quotas. Meanwhile, census takers, labor organizers, and politicians counted, mobilized, and courted the votes of "Italians."<sup>18</sup>

California's multiethnic setting contributed to the broadened identity. Scholars have repeatedly distinguished the experience of the state's European ethnics from those of their East Coast counterparts, who suffered more sustained and harsher discrimination. Historians attribute the difference to the presence of Asian, Mexican, and Native Americans, who deflected White racial animosities away from White ethnics.<sup>19</sup> The targets of California's nativist movement and the ethnoracial expressions of Italians themselves support this interpretation. While preoccupied with harassing Catholics in the eastern United States, the California branch of the infamous nativist organization the Know-Nothing Party confined its attacks to Chinese at the turn of the century. And Italians did not stand on the sidelines. Italian fishermen of San Francisco Bay protested an attempted repeal of a tax levied against their Chinese competitors, insisting the payments were necessary protection for "White fisherman" against the "Mongolians." Italian-American leaders echoed this defensive notion of community when they condemned the goods, shops, and manners of Chinese and Japanese in the early 1910s.<sup>20</sup>

As the century progressed, an Italian identity was often defined by what or who it was not. The recollections of Joe Cruciano and Teresa Angeluzzi reflect the changing sensibilities of so many Italian Americans. Cruciano remembered playing with Black peers who “were very nice, very funny” in the state’s Central Valley during the 1930s. Yet he never felt completely at ease in their company. “But they were oppressed, you could see it,” he stated. “And I felt deprived as I was.” This instinct to distinguish themselves from other minorities, to prove how American they had become, motivated the prejudices of Teresa Angeluzzi’s in-laws. With the worst of the Depression years behind them, the Italian immigrant couple hired Mexicans for their expanding farm. Although Teresa Angeluzzi’s mother-in-law sympathized with the plight of migrant laborers, she treated the men as her inferiors. Angeluzzi’s father-in-law conveyed this distaste and sense of hierarchy more starkly, referring to his employees by the pejorative “Messians.”<sup>21</sup>

While Ligurians and Sicilians were becoming California Italians, men from many areas of the Philippines were inventing and being invented as “Filipinos.” The 1896 revolution that liberated the Pacific islands from Spanish rule sparked a spirit of nationalism. But despite this enlivened sense of connectedness, few residents considered themselves in geographic terms broader than the town, province, or region in which they lived. These narrower loyalties initially survived the transition to California. Language differences and ideas of kinship divided Ilocanos, Visayans, and Tagalogs. But as Dawn Mabalon has argued, though their paths may never have crossed back home, the time they spent together in fields, dance halls, and gambling dens in the United States brought the men together. As exploited workers who hailed from a territory effectively controlled by the United States, they found things in common. For example, union organizers slowly convinced men to set aside their sectionalist feelings and act as a unified group. Their nationalist expressions remained more muted than those of Chinese or Korean immigrants who, from the safe distance of California, angrily denounced Japan’s occupation of their respective countries in the early twentieth century. Tasked to resist colonization from inside the land of the colonizer, Filipinos adopted quieter, more indirect tactics.<sup>22</sup>

American citizens and their legislators described the diverse islanders as “Filipinos.” Alarmed by the volume of emigration from the Philippines in the 1920s and 1930s, U.S. officials moved to redefine the political relationship of the United States and the Pacific nation and to dramatically reduce the movement of its citizens to the United States. The

1934 Tydings McDuffie Act reclassified Filipinos as aliens and limited their entry to fifty people annually. Revisions to the state's antimiscegenation law blurred the significance of regional distinctions as well. Regardless of their provincial origins, all islanders were categorized as "Malays" and added to those racial groups prohibited from marrying "Whites." Momentum for these statutory changes originated from diverse Californians. While established Whites characterized Filipinos as clever brown men on the make, Japanese and Chinese immigrants were as ready to stereotype and slander, portraying Filipinos as savage and dirty.

But the Japanese were themselves an ethnoracial group generated from experiences of movement and settlement in California. Many of these immigrants had left Japan at a moment of ascendant nationalism. The newly installed Meiji regime challenged regional and feudal loyalties in its attempt to create a more capacious community. Imagining a more unified Japan involved drawing lines of cultural and racial distinction. Although the Japanese acknowledged affinities with other Asians, whom they called common members of the "yellow" race and allies in a global struggle against the West, they simultaneously claimed physical and intellectual superiority over Chinese, Koreans, and Filipinos. These notions of kinship played out and evolved among the Japanese of California. Eiichiro Azuma has described the process by which Issei built collective memories and an "undifferentiated identity" through their writing of informal histories during the 1920s. These narratives celebrated Japanese as brave pioneers integral to the development of the American West and the overseas expansion of Japan. Glossing over the realities of their racial troubles as aliens ineligible for citizenship, landownership, or open immigration, Issei declared their equality with Whites and distance from other minorities.<sup>23</sup>

The Japanese of California enacted this historical understanding when they spoke and thought about Filipinos. Between 1930 and 1941 Japanese of the San Joaquin delta constructed themselves as a race distinct and superior to the Filipinos who worked their farms. The unpopular marriage of a Filipino man and Japanese-American woman initiated a decade of clashes. Filipinos boycotted Japanese businesses or struck against farmers in retaliation for what the Filipinos perceived as unfair wages, prices, and labor conditions. The Japanese answered these complaints by collaborating with local law enforcement, hiring strikebreakers, and convincing sympathetic Japanese workers to favor an imagined ethnic community over one of mistreated laborers. These delta residents

increasingly conceived of their fight against Filipinos in racial and national terms; the struggle was the domestic corollary of the battle that Imperial Japan waged for supremacy over other Asian nations. In other words, by subordinating Filipinos, Issei believed they contributed to the strength of their homeland. Filipinos in turn forgave ethnic differences when faced with hostile Japanese. Capitalizing on deteriorating relations between Japan and the United States, Filipinos boasted of their American loyalty in contrast to that of the Issei. Such interethnic rivalries and the racial understandings they helped generate were not consistent throughout California. However, the case of the delta demonstrates how nationalism and international competition shaped ethnoracial groups in California.<sup>24</sup>

Regional loyalties conditioned the attachments of American-born migrants, too. The thousands of Whites who left behind the poverty of 1930s Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Missouri for the promise of California were discomfited by a population more multiethnic, and a racial tolerance seemingly greater, than the South's. White southwesterners resented that culturally unfamiliar Filipinos and Mexicans competed for and often won the agricultural jobs they coveted. That foreign-born Whites or Japanese immigrants were sometimes their employers or their contractors further disoriented the White southwesterners. But the position of Blacks bothered the "Okies" most of all.<sup>25</sup> Although African Americans in California suffered more than the Okies, Blacks gained new opportunities in education and the economy. Such relative advantages brought African Americans uncomfortably close to White migrants; the most startling break in racial segregation happened in schools, where Okie children learned alongside Blacks for the first time in their educational career. This social proximity infuriated Whites already disappointed by the prejudices they had encountered. In the context of a depressed economy, resident Whites came to perceive the Okie newcomers not as fellow citizens in desperate straits but as an alien social group. They derided Okies as social and physical inferiors, as those whose poverty and limited education were innate characteristics. Such perceptions clashed with the migrants' own view of themselves as "true" Americans whose ethnic background guaranteed them certain advantages. In maintaining the distaste for Blacks so characteristic of their southern homes, the Okies found an outlet for their frustration and potential source of affiliation with other Whites. James Gregory has described this California-grown sensibility as neither particularistic nor strictly exclusive. Rather, Okies claimed solidarity with all Whites who shared their

values of independence and individualism. This vision of group identity firmly set the White southwesterners apart from California's Blacks, Asians, Mexicans, and even foreign-born Europeans.<sup>26</sup>

Integral to the process of making ethnoracial communities of Italians, Filipinos, Japanese, and "Okies"—as well as African Americans, Mexicans, Jews, Chinese, and Native Americans—were immigration policies, property laws, marital statutes, employment practices, and housing covenants. While the 1924 immigration act established national quotas that hurried the transformation of Ligurians into Italians, it also codified racial understandings that would facilitate the consolidation of European ethnics as Whites and the long exclusion of Asians and Mexicans. In her review of the statute Mae Ngai described how the act disentangled concepts of race and nationality, differentiating European ethnics even as it aggregated them as part of the White race. But for Chinese, Mexicans, and Filipinos, racial and ethnic identities remained the same. Rather than national quotas, the racial creation of "Asiatic" governed the migration of Filipinos, Chinese, and Japanese. In the case of Mexicans the dictates of foreign policy, privileges promised under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and labor market demands made it more difficult to block their entry on a racial basis. Yet administrative devices achieved the desired outcome. The enforcement of a ban on contract labor, the admission of a literacy test, and the screening out of those deemed "likely to become a public charge" effectively reduced legal, and increasingly illegal, Mexican emigration. Follow-up legislation—laws that made unlawful entry a felony and lifted the statute of limitations on deportation—not only criminalized illegal entry but also racialized such behavior as "Mexican." Illegal, in other words, became associated with Mexicans, regardless of their citizenship or immigration status.<sup>27</sup>

Marital and property laws drew similar lines of demarcation that helped create Mexicans, Asians, and Blacks as groups apart from most European ethnics. Alien land laws prohibited Asian immigrants from owning property, a prohibition that made more onerous the already heavy burden of being ineligible for citizenship, as established in the Naturalization Act of 1790. Other restrictions on property affected a broader cross-section of minorities. In addition to the informal acts of real estate agents and landlords who refused sales and rentals to non-Whites, housing covenants dramatically constrained residence. Devised by homeowners concerned about maintaining the "Whiteness" of their community, these agreements prohibited Asians, Mexicans, Blacks, Native Americans, and, customarily, Jews from buying or renting property.

First introduced during the 1890s, covenants were used by about 20 percent of Realtors in 1920. However, the figure had risen to 80 percent by 1940. Not until the 1948 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Shelley v. Kraemer* did states lose the right to enforce racial restrictions on real estate.<sup>28</sup>

Access to housing influenced notions of ethnoracial community, but so did rules of marriage and employment practices. In response to rising rates of immigration and coincident fears about interracial intimacy, the California legislature passed a statute in 1850 prohibiting marriage between Whites and Blacks. In 1880 it expanded these limits by inventing new ethnoracial categories. Neither a “Negro Mulatto, [nor] Mongolian” could marry a White person. Although legislators originally designed the classification of “Mongolian” to restrict the rights of Chinese, officials soon applied it to Japanese as well. That an immigrant from Japan or China might conceive of himself in narrower, more national terms—conceptions formed out of his diasporic experiences—failed to register among or concern California Whites. Nor, as I mentioned earlier, did they notice the distinctions that divided Filipinos. These islanders were merged together under the label “Malay.”

This disinterest in the origins and ambitions of minorities also confined them to the most disappointing jobs. Through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, California saw the evolution of a system of capitalism premised upon a racialized division of labor. Under this regime ethnic and racial differences came to closely parallel class distinctions. Large-scale farming, food processing, construction, and petroleum industries depended upon the presence of a sizable, mobile, and inexpensive supply of labor. Aggressively recruited and deftly shuffled Asians, Mexicans, and Blacks fulfilled this economic need and assured California’s prosperity. These groups were largely responsible for constructing the state’s physical infrastructure, extracting its precious minerals, and growing its fruits and vegetables. Yet they endured the lowest wages, longest hours, and slimmest chances for upward mobility. Many native-born Whites had abandoned occupations in these areas for more lucrative opportunities as independent farmers, skilled industrial laborers, and business owners. The national economic crisis of the 1930s only darkened this already-bleak employment picture. For those lucky enough to keep their jobs and, in the case of Mexicans and Filipinos subject to repatriation, keep their homes on American soil, the Depression reinforced a racially stratified labor system. It was within this environment structured around the customary and legally embedded ethnoracial

expectations of Whites that Californians made social and eventually political ties.

The expansion and accumulation of affiliations were essential to the integration of California's newcomers. After becoming American ethnics, they would become American panethnics; they multiplied their attachments as they confronted White racism and discovered cultural commonalities or opportunities with other groups. This pushing out of self and group boundaries took place in spaces of remarkable diversity.

## NEIGHBORS

The separations and connections among California's diverse peoples in the first decades of the twentieth century were imprinted upon the physical landscape. Although the early ethnracial thinking of these varied migrants predisposed them to keep apart, their paths intersected within California, thanks to formal and informal restrictions. In other regions of the nation, living on the other side of the tracks often meant living in monoethnic ghettos. But in California those districts most segregated from Whites were often those most integrated with multiple minorities (see table 1). This physical reality made possible, if not inevitable, the interethnic mixings and mingling that ultimately broadened the systems of difference upon which migrants had first settled.

Restrictive housing practices and laws concentrated non-Whites in the same neighborhoods, but the de facto segregation of public areas, schools, places of worship, and businesses made the intermingling of non-Whites even more likely. Mexicans, Asians, and Blacks frequently watched films from special balconies reserved for minority customers or patronized theaters more accepting of their business. "You could go to this one theater, and that was all right because that was where all the people of color would go," explained Connie Tirona, a Filipina from Vallejo, "but if you went beyond to the next block, people would stare at you." Restaurants refused service to those of darker complexion or seated them in distinct sections. Public pools reinforced White privilege as well. Hoping to prevent perceived contamination, administrators typically scheduled swimming days for minority children immediately before pool cleanings. At a pool in San Francisco the ticket taker told a young girl that "all Mexicans have to have a health card to get in" before turning her away. Beginning in the early 1920s city ordinances in Los Angeles kept Issei off public golf courses and tennis courts.<sup>29</sup>

TABLE I. ETHNORACIAL COMPOSITION OF SELECT CITIES AND NEIGHBORHOODS  
(% populations, 1950<sup>1</sup>)

	Boyle Heights	Watts	Central Downtown	L.A. City	Fillmore District <sup>2,3</sup>	S.F. City <sup>3</sup>	West Oakland <sup>2,3</sup>	Oakland City <sup>3</sup>	East Sacramento <sup>2</sup>	Sacramento City	West Berkeley	Berkeley City
Asian <sup>3</sup>	15.0	0.5	8.4	2.0	15.0	5.0	7.8	2.1	19.0	4.4	5.0	3.7
Black	6.0	28.0	41.0	8.7	44.0	6.0	38.0	12.0	13.0	3.2	30.0	12.2
Foreign-born												
White	27.0	8.0	9.9	12.0	10.0	16.0	12.8	10.0	13.0	8.9	8.6	13.0
All White	79.0	71.0	50.0	89.0	40.0	90.0	43.0	85.0	66.0	92.0	60.0	84.0
Mex/Hisp <sup>4</sup>	46.0	13.0		2.0		0.7	1.6	0.5	2.6	1.1	0.5	0.4

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Census, *Seventeenth Census of the United States: 1950, Population and Housing Statistics for Census Tracts*, San Francisco—Oakland Census Tracts, Los Angeles Census Tracts, Sacramento Census Tracts (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1952). Blank spaces in the chart indicate where data were incomplete or the ethnoracial group made up less than 0.5 percent of the neighborhood's or city's total population.

<sup>1</sup>Averaged and rounded, figures do not add up to 100 percent in most cases.

<sup>2</sup>Figures for the Fillmore District, East Sacramento, and West Oakland are averages of relevant census tracts.

<sup>3</sup>In the San Francisco and Oakland census Asian ethnics are categorized as "other race."

<sup>4</sup>The category "Mex/Hispanic" counts only those born in Mexico for all census tracts except those of Watts and Boyle Heights. In these latter locations the census counts all residents of Hispanic descent.

Even at school and places of worship Whites deliberately separated themselves from minorities. They drew or redrew district boundaries or counted upon residential segregation to exclude non-White students, especially Mexican- and African-American youngsters. When challenged, educators and administrators argued that minorities' poor language skills and low intelligence justified the arrangement. Because of geography and deliberate policy, non-Whites worshiped separately as well. Many White churches either barred minorities or offered segregated services, hostile officiants, and specially reserved back pews. But as local institutions, houses of worship reflected a neighborhood's ethnoracial makeup. Thus a multicultural environment often explained an institution's diversity as much as its procedures of selection. As examples, Peoples Church in Berkeley, St. Patrick's in Los Angeles, and Trinity in Sacramento had Black, Filipino, Chinese, and Japanese congregants.<sup>30</sup>

Commercial districts tucked inside mixed neighborhoods brought minorities together as well. The reluctance of Whites to service and fairly compensate minority populations meant minorities frequently served and employed one another. Thus whether shopping nearby for groceries or seeking medical attention, a stiff drink, or an after-school job, non-Whites often found that the face on the other side of the counter, the stethoscope, the bar rail, or the paycheck belonged to another non-White. Economic depression only encouraged these patterns of interethnic interdependence as minorities, largely denied the levels of governmental aid offered to Whites, turned toward the local community for relief. Jews and African Americans opened small businesses, but Chinese and Japanese Americans were among the most entrepreneurial. On the edges of or inside the Black and Mexican communities of San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles, Chinese and Japanese Americans established their operations and attended to local needs. Also, enterprising Asian ethnics, especially Chinese and Japanese, most commonly provided sites of rest and relaxation for other Asian men excluded from White restaurants, parks, theaters, dance clubs, and other social venues. Minorities spun a localized web of economic connections as a convenient and available strategy for survival in a time of economic discrimination and depression.<sup>31</sup>

A distinctive, racialized geography resulted from the scarce resources of non-Whites as well as the restrictions on housing, worship, education, public facilities, and employment. Those of the same ethnicity often congregated together, but they did not form isolated or perfectly self-contained enclaves. Instead, non-Whites *as a group* tended to be segregated. "Far from being randomly distributed," observed urban demographers in 1949

Los Angeles, “these five groups, Negroes, Orientals, Russians (mainly Jewish), Mexicans, and Italians are found in greater concentration in some census tracts than in others, and they tend to be closely associated with one another in their distribution.” The scholars went on to conclude that “Negroes, Mexicans, and Orientals” were the most isolated groups and most likely to live in adjacent or mixed city blocks. Residents of these neighborhoods scored lowest in income, schooling, and level of occupation. A survey of housing in central Los Angeles—only Japanese and Mexicans had any significant presence outside this area—stated that Whites occupied a mere 18.3 percent of substandard housing compared with 28.6 percent of Blacks, 47.2 percent of Asians, and 59.6 percent of Mexicans. In contrast, the city’s White southwesterners demonstrated a pattern of residential dispersion. The closest the White migrants came to concentrated settlement as a migrant group was in newer subdivisions on the outskirts of Los Angeles. Thanks to their citizenship and color, they had the freedom, a freedom they happily exercised, to live wherever they could afford to.<sup>32</sup>

In the San Francisco Bay Area officials noted a similarly skewed ethnoracial and socioeconomic distribution. In 1954 the San Francisco Department of City Planning concluded: “More than half of the dwellings occupied by non-White families are concentrated in about 175 city blocks which contain 50 percent or greater non-White occupancy.” This pattern of residence roughly repeated itself in Oakland, where the housing authority in 1945 reported the confluence of poverty and a large minority population. This pattern of concentrated residence continued throughout the 1950s; by the 1960 census, the concentration of non-Whites had only deepened, with 89 percent of them squeezed into 22.2 percent of the city’s census tracts (see map 1).<sup>33</sup>

More recent evaluations of race, ethnicity, and space in California have confirmed the convergence of non-Whites. The Center for Geographical Studies at California State University, Northridge, has determined that in Los Angeles between 1935 and 1955, not only were Mexicans “living close to or somewhat intermixed with immigrants from Europe or with Blacks, Japanese, or Chinese” but also that “pockets of multiethnic neighborhoods were quite common in poorer areas and were usually distinct from neighborhoods in which U.S.-born whites lived.”<sup>34</sup> Historians of both the Bay Area and Los Angeles have acknowledged how “ethnic intermixing characterized most but not all central and east side communities,” creating a “heterogeneous ethnic population,” in the first half of the century.<sup>35</sup>

[To view this image, refer to  
the print version of this title.]

Map 1. Distribution of non-White population, City of Oakland; based upon U.S. Census data, 1960. Source: Bryce Young, *Oakland's Changing Community Patterns* (Oakland City Planning Department, 1961).

The most recognized and largest minority districts appeared in California's major cities during the second quarter of the twentieth century. In Los Angeles Whites, who represented almost 93 percent of the county's population, separated themselves on the West Side, surrendering downtown and East Los Angeles to new immigrants and Blacks.<sup>36</sup> Specific ethnoracial clusters dotted the area, yet they proved porous and imprecisely defined. Almost one-third of Jews resided in Boyle Heights, with significant pockets in South Central and on Temple Street. Meanwhile, African Americans clustered around Central and Slauson streets, with smaller settlements in West Jefferson, Watts, and South Pasadena (see map 2). Large numbers of Mexicans mingled among Blacks in these same sections or joined Jews and Japanese in Boyle Heights (see map 3).<sup>37</sup>

Like their non-White peers, Japanese were shoehorned into neighborhoods near commercial and industrial sections of Los Angeles. Some Japanese established homes as distant from downtown as West Los Angeles and Hollywood, but Little Tokyo (adjacent to Central Avenue), the West Jefferson area, and Boyle Heights absorbed almost all others. Japanese frequently shared blocks with Blacks. Within 1940 census tracts roughly bounded by Alameda, Central, Washington, and Jefferson streets, Blacks comprised 58 percent and Asian ethnics 29 percent of the population totals. Given that Blacks represented less than 3 percent and Asian ethnics not even 2 percent of the citywide population, these figures are striking. Japanese spread steadily westward from West Jefferson Street toward Van Ness Avenue. African Americans, who also were eager to capture space that opened up as Whites suburbanized in the 1940s, accompanied these Asian pioneers (see map 4).<sup>38</sup>

The much smaller populations of Chinese, Filipinos, and Koreans blended in with other minorities in Los Angeles. After the razing of Chinatown in 1933, Chinese relocated among Mexicans, Japanese, Blacks, and Jews in city sections marked by Hill and Broadway as well as San Pedro and Central. Chinese and Filipinos typically shared residence in 1940 (see maps 5 and 6). Although smaller in numbers, Filipinos as well as Koreans gathered near the larger Chinese community between Main and Los Angeles, west of downtown, or between Vermont and Western avenues. Sections of San Francisco and other metropolitan areas reproduced this same overlap of Asian ethnics. But enterprising Chinese also located themselves and their businesses in largely Mexican neighborhoods farther east. There, as Marshall Hoo explained, Chinese Americans found a ready supply of minority customers and rents that were much less expensive.<sup>39</sup>

[To view this image, refer to  
the print version of this title.]

Map 2. Distribution of African-American population, City of Los Angeles; based upon U.S. Census data, 1940. Source: Courtesy of the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation. Earl Hansen and Paul Beckett, *Los Angeles: Its Peoples and Its Homes* (Los Angeles: Haynes Foundation, 1949), following p. 36.

[To view this image, refer to  
the print version of this title.]

Map 3. Distribution of foreign-born Mexican population, City of Los Angeles; based upon U.S. Census data, 1940. Source: Courtesy of the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation. Earl Hansen and Paul Beckett, *Los Angeles: Its Peoples and Its Homes* (Los Angeles: Haynes Foundation, 1949), following p. 36.

[To view this image, refer to  
the print version of this title.]

Map 4. Distribution of ethnic Japanese population, City of Los Angeles; based upon U.S. Census data, 1940. Source: Courtesy of the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation. Earl Hansen and Paul Beckett, *Los Angeles: Its Peoples and Its Homes* (Los Angeles: Haynes Foundation, 1949), following p. 38.

[To view this image, refer to  
the print version of this title.]

Map 5. Distribution of ethnic Chinese population, City of Los Angeles; based upon U.S. Census data, 1940. Source: Courtesy of the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation. Earl Hansen and Paul Beckett, *Los Angeles: Its Peoples and Its Homes* (Los Angeles: Haynes Foundation, 1949), following p. 40.

[To view this image, refer to  
the print version of this title.]

Map 6. Distribution of ethnic Filipino population, City of Los Angeles; based upon U.S. Census data, 1940. Source: Courtesy of the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation. Earl Hansen and Paul Beckett, *Los Angeles: Its Peoples and Its Homes* (Los Angeles: Haynes Foundation, 1949), following p. 40.

Within this minority medley of east and central Los Angeles, some sections stood out as particularly eclectic. Before World War II Boyle Heights boasted a population of 25,000 Jews, 15,000 Mexicans, and 5,000 Japanese. “The neighborhood was very diverse,” recalled Harry Honda, a Nisei. “We had Chinese families, Korean families, Latino families, Jewish families.” Art Takei confirmed this portrait, explaining that although Boyle Heights would become “predominantly Latino,” he “was brought up in a real diversified community” where “it was just everyone.” Based upon the 1940 census, African, Asian, and Mexican Americans accounted for approximately one-third and foreign-born Whites another one-quarter of Boyle Heights’s population, much higher fractions than their presence in the city’s population overall. Foreign-born Whites accounted for 21 to 28 percent, again, a rate higher than the city’s average.<sup>40</sup> Those who settled in Watts during the second quarter of the twentieth century remembered the neighborhood as similarly mixed with non-Whites. “The environment there was almost all races, and we got along very well. There were Whites, Mexicans, Orientals, Jewish people,” explained William Woodman. Another resident suggested that the town’s blacks, Mexicans, and Japanese “kept out” of White areas and remained among themselves, respecting the unspoken racial divide.<sup>41</sup> Census data supports these recollections. Almost equal numbers of foreign-born Whites, Mexicans, and Blacks—4 to 9 percent, 13 percent, and 14 percent, respectively—called Watts home in 1940.<sup>42</sup>

San Francisco’s Fillmore District and Western Addition also supported a blended and changing minority population. A majority of the city’s Black residents made their home in the area roughly bounded by Post, Sutter, Bush, and Pine streets. Adjacent and melting into the African-American district was a Japanese section bounded by Geary, Pine, Octavia, and Webster. But as in Los Angeles these ethnic clusters were no more than loose collections of peoples. Jews, Filipinos, and, to a lesser extent, Mexicans added to the diversity of the Fillmore and Western Addition. According to *Crisis*, the official publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, in 1945 “even the area of Negro concentration, the Fillmore district, did not constitute a ‘Black Belt’” because “sizeable groups of Whites, Filipinos, Chinese and Japanese resided in the same area.” Former residents remembered its eclecticism. We grew up “with every color you could think of,” explained Sugar Pie De Santo, a Filipina-Black woman, of her 1940s neighborhood. Jerry Flamm, a Jewish storekeeper, recalled the important place of Jews within the “ethnic and cultural mix” of the Fillmore. In fact, the district’s

demography was so unusual that it became a point of curiosity among adventure-seeking tourists and locals. “In two chief Negro neighborhoods, between Fillmore and Divisadero streets, from California to Fulton streets, a great cosmopolitan neighborhood has grown up,” stated one guidebook. The presence of “the Negro and the White man, Orientals of many sorts, East Indians, West Indians and American Indians” as well as “many inter-racial families” who supposedly lived “amicably side by side,” made the area “San Francisco’s melting pot.” In 1940 minorities (classified as Black, “other races,” and people born in Mexico) constituted no more than 5 percent of the city’s population overall, but they represented 39 percent of residents in the district.<sup>43</sup>

Given the diversity of its business owners and clientele, San Francisco’s Chinatown section was misleadingly named. Filipinos and Japanese filled the district, operating small businesses or consuming local services. Japanese Americans in particular competed with Chinese-owned enterprises in providing food, hotel rooms, medical advice, or Asian-imported collectibles to local Asian Americans as well as curious White tourists. Taking advantage of the tendency among White Americans to conflate Asian ethnicities, Japanese, Koreans, and Filipinos served up “Oriental” goods and Americanized Chinese food to outsiders who imagined the proprietors as representatives of an exotic China. In a pattern repeated across California cities, single young Filipino men looking for leisure activities and blocked from most White-owned and -patronized establishments, dined, played pool, gambled, danced, and slept in businesses run by Japanese or Chinese Americans. Japanese youth and families gravitated toward San Francisco’s Chinatown for fun and festivity, too. In a recent interview Tarao Neishi, a Japanese American, explained that Chinatown was “the only kind of place we could go” before World War II. The report of the sociologist Rose Hum Lee and disgruntled comments made by Chinese-American residents on the eve of World War II documented exactly how sizable was the presence of non-Chinese Asians in the neighborhood. Rose Hum Lee counted as many as fifty Japanese shops ringing Chinatown. Meanwhile a writer for the *Chinese Digest* in 1935 editorialized that “the Japanese have already taken the southern half of Chinatown—our best bazaar section—and we are reminded of what harm is being done our bazaars when cheap imitations and flimsy curios flood Grant Avenue.” Thanks to White prejudices, cultural preferences, and economic opportunities, Asian ethnics collected in Chinatown.<sup>44</sup>

Unlike the city’s Asian ethnics, Jews, Mexicans, and African Americans, its Italian immigrants were more dispersed and more likely to live

alongside other European ethnics. By 1940, 47 percent of Italians owned homes compared with 41 percent of non-Italian foreign-born families. In those census tracts that contained the largest numbers of Italians, the ethnic group still comprised little more than one-third of the total population. Germans, French, and Spanish speakers made up the remainder. Less than 2 percent of residents in the Italian-heavy tracts were non-White. In San Francisco the relative integration of European ethnics and their collective separation from minorities likely contributed to those sensibilities related by Italian Americans to researcher Micaela Di Leonardo. Looking back upon their lives in mid-twentieth century California, her middle-aged informants remembered Irish and Germans as “people like themselves.” For European ethnics, as much as for Blacks, Mexicans, or Asians, where they lived and who lived nearby had a profound effect upon their ethnoracial notions.<sup>45</sup>

Across the bay from San Francisco, Oakland’s established Whites similarly arranged their residential space. Minorities converged in the city’s western end near local manufacturers and the terminus of the railroad. In this densely settled section west of Grove Street and San Pablo Avenue and south of Emeryville, non-Whites lived in housing that officials declared to be the worst in the city. Mexicans, Blacks, Japanese, and Chinese readily mingled. Rose Mary Escobar and her mother rented upstairs rooms from a Japanese family that occupied the flat below. In the same neighborhood Mexican Americans “coexisted with the growing African American community” that settled there in growing numbers through the 1940s. Although West Oakland would become a more singularly Black district during the 1950s and 1960s, in the second quarter of the twentieth century it integrated a remarkable collection of non-Whites. The two census tracts with the highest density of African Americans, 35 to 38 percent (compared with a citywide percentage of just 3 percent), also had twice as many Asian ethnics and four times as many Mexican immigrants as Oakland’s overall population. In an adjacent tract the mix of non-Whites was even more balanced. Blacks and Asian ethnics represented 11 percent and 5 percent of the total, respectively. Where Asian ethnics were most concentrated, making up as much as 45 percent of two census tracts within West Oakland, Blacks still appeared in significant numbers. Alternatively, the 1940 census reported how evenly foreign-born Whites were distributed. In no single tract did they exceed 22 percent or dip below 7.4 percent of the total, figures that fell close to their 14.1 percent share of the city’s total population.<sup>46</sup>

Minorities lived in the easternmost sections of Berkeley, just along the city's border with Oakland. Asian ethnics and Blacks most conspicuously converged in two census tracts marked by Grove Street on the north, San Pablo along the south, Dwight Way to the east, and Russell to the west. Combined, the ethnoracial groups represented no more than 6 percent of Berkeley's total, but in these eastern neighborhoods Blacks made up 31 percent and Asian ethnics between 7 and 22 percent of the residents. In contrast, and as in other metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas of California, foreign-born Whites were found in relatively equal numbers across the city.<sup>47</sup>

Although smaller in size, California's rural towns segregated non-Whites as decisively as their big-city counterparts. Chinese, Mexicans, Filipinos, Japanese, and some Blacks resided in the state's fertile valleys, where they shared bunkhouses, makeshift camps, hotels, or old houses. In cities like Fresno and Stockton, where migratory laborers rested from fieldwork and waited out rainy winters, non-Whites occupied clearly defined territory. "Fresno shows a rather interesting situation," a surprised reporter wrote in 1936. "This town is divided into two parts. One 'west' and one 'east' of the railway tracks. 'West' of the tracks is the foreign-born residential section, in which at least thirty different nationalities are represented." In central Stockton Japanese, Chinese, and eventually Filipinos converged in what became known as the "Oriental Quarter." Chinese immigrants first settled the area bordered by Market, Lafayette, El Dorado, and Hunter streets in the nineteenth century. Japanese soon joined them, building a residential and commercial presence that overlapped with and extended west of Chinatown. When Filipinos arrived in larger numbers in the 1920s and '30s, they too blended into the mostly Asian district; their attempts to find housing, leisure, and basic goods outside the quarter met with immediate opposition. Along El Dorado Street they frequented restaurants, gambling dens, and pool halls, many operated by Chinese or Japanese Americans. A comparable split marked the landscapes of Sacramento and Watsonville. The 1950 census corroborated Ernesto Galarza's depiction of California's capital as a city where Blacks, Asians, and Mexicans concentrated in the easternmost and northernmost sectors. Although these ethnoracial groups represented 3.2 percent, 4.5 percent, and 1 percent, respectively, of the city's total population, in the area bounded by R, Capitol, and 7th streets they comprised 23 percent, 45 percent, and 6 percent of the total. The neighborhood's large number of Mexicans is even more apparent when calculated as a percentage of the district's foreign-born White population: 62 percent.<sup>48</sup>

Watsonville's demographics conformed to the same pattern of segregation. There, "an understanding prevailed," remarked local resident Duncan Chin, that "Asians, Africans, and Mexicans . . . would stay south of the plaza."<sup>49</sup>

Even in more sparsely populated areas such as the Imperial Valley, non-Whites generally became neighbors. "The Mexican and Negro settlement is found 'across the tracks' as a rule," one citizen observed of towns in the valley, and were "fairly well marked off from the sections inhabited by the Whites." According to a study of housing in the valley, sections east of the Southern Pacific railroad tracks held the majority of substandard housing. In towns such as Brawley and Calexico, Mexicans resided in approximately three-quarters of the properties deemed uninhabitable. This pattern proved typical of the region: Mexicans, Punjabis, Japanese, Chinese, and Blacks established businesses and residence in self-contained eastern sections, rarely venturing into the White western end.<sup>50</sup>

Chinatowns, Little Manilas, Mexican barrios, Black districts, and Japantowns occupied the residential and commercial landscape of California, but these settlements were more flexible and fluid than self-contained. Black districts bled into barrios, while Filipinos lived inside Chinatowns. Small numbers of European immigrants inhabited these areas, too. Thanks to housing discrimination and financial constraints, minorities occupied multiethnic rather than ethnically singular territory.

## CONCLUSION

Coming together in California, ethnic migrants, immigrants, and established residents collectively and often competitively created systems of difference. Notions of nationalism, American laws, cultural diversity, and misperceptions fixed, at least temporarily, the parameters of groups. These conceptual and emotional borders of distinction took on spatial forms. Minorities converged in many of the same city and rural districts, forming multiethnic swaths within the larger, more monoethnic field of California. Inside and outside these integrated environments, which were segregated from White neighborhoods, panethnic social, cultural, and eventually political relationships evolved.